November 2, 1988

Summary notes of meeting between KK and CCF

Objective of Point: to publish WER and one book a year

Problems: expenses in excess of revenues ($8,500/month average loss)
staff physically split between two offices
communication among staff we@k
Cost to organization of projects, ex. staff get pulled away from regular responsibilities, stress, morale
Payroll costs as percentage of total expenses (through Sept., total expenses have been $457,853; payroll salaries to date are $161,132, which is 35% of total expenses. That's not counting payroll tax costs.)

How can some of these issues be addressed/improved?

Communication: more frequent planned meetings among small groups to address topics. Ex. When considering a new book project, meet with RN, JC and CCH to discuss and get feedback about editorial possibilities. Discuss same project with KO, DR and LW to discuss production needs of project; discuss with circ and fin'l staff to get input about costs.
Physical split: could the WELL get moved to produ ction space?
Excess expenses: what level of costs will 20,000 subscribers support?
What expenses areas can we reduce? (ex. rent, staff costs)
How can we increase revenues? subscription increase and improved newsstand are major revenue sources.
Cost of projects: How can be plan better? More projects like Fringes? Signal? Can we afford to pull staff away from their regular jobs? For jobs such as production, which have on/off periods, can we better schedule books so that current production staff can get more hours without having burnout happen?

My own thoughts/ideas:

If there was a stronger sense of organizational purpose/goals, there might be a structure that supports better communication and planning. Both of these could help address some of the above issues by allowing staff to have input before a decision is made and by dealing with potential problems before they occur. Paul's running of the last staff meeting helped produce a more effective meeting. The challenge is often in the area of followup. However, as a concrete suggestion for improvements, having a more formal agenda for each meeting and having the meeting moderated a bit more, might help people feel as if something constructive was happening. Also, if more frequent smaller meetings happen on an ongoing basis, the larger meetings may get shorter and take on a different personality, ie. they may become a place where summaries of activities take place and broader issues get discussed. By also addressing the larger goals of the organization, it might help us set priorities and make choices among all of the different options that exist.

Are staff making decisions that are in the best interest of everyone? We will always have to trust that the people we hire are able to use good judgement, but if they don't have any context in which to look at their decision, they may be unable to make the best choices. For example, I may decide to spend 3 hours doing some financial analysis that I think is important. But if there is no intention of anyone ever using that analysis, was my time well spent? Right now, who's to say?

If we knew we had to plan a book project to submit to publishers in Oct each year, all the people affected (which is really everyone), would be able to take steps through the first nine months to help achieve that goal. If people know there's going to be an issue that focuses on a particular topic, they may be able to contibute editorially or use that knowledge to help promote the magazine effectively. I often feel as if there's a reactive style of operating around here, which makes it very had to feel as if you're having any kind of an impact.

Hopefully our meeting next wednesday will be productive. I'm glad we had the chance to talk this morning, because the concerns I brought up have been dogging me for a while.

Cindy